

6. NOTE ON A TALKING CANARY, ADDRESSED TO DR. GRAY,  
V.P.Z.S. BY S. LEIGH SOTHEBY.

The Woodlands, Norwood, Surrey,  
March 26, 1858.

DEAR SIR,

Touching that marvellous little specimen of the feathered tribe, a Talking Canary, of which I had the pleasure a few days since of telling you, I now send you all the information I can obtain respecting it from the lady by whom it was brought up and educated at this our homestead.

Its parents had previously and successfully reared many young ones; but three years ago they hatched only *one* out of four eggs, the which they immediately neglected, by commencing the rebuilding of a nest upon the top of it. Upon this discovery, the unfledged and forsaken bird, all but dead, was taken away and placed in flannel by the fire, when after much attention it was restored and then brought up by hand. Thus treated, and away from all other birds, it became familiarized with those only who fed it; consequently, its first singing notes were of a character totally different to those usual with the Canary.

Constantly being talked to, the bird, when about three months old, astonished its mistress by repeating the endearing terms used in talking to it, such as "*Kissie, Kissie,*" with its significant sounds. This went on, and from time to time the little bird repeated other words; and now, for hours together, except during the moulting season, astonishes us by *ringing the changes*, according to its own fancy, and as plain as any human voice can articulate them, on the several words—"Dear sweet *Titchie*" (its name), "*Kiss Minnie,*" "*Kiss me then dear Minnie,*" "*Sweet pretty little Titchie,*" "*Kissie, kissie, kissie,*" "*Dear Titchie,*" "*Titchie wee, gee, gee, gee, Titchie, Titchie.*"

Now as I have shown that the great Melanchthon signed his name in no less than *sixty* different ways in uniting the words *Philippus Melanchthon* (see the plate of faesimiles in my work, a copy of which is in the British Museum), you will not be surprised at the extraordinary manner in which the dear little bird varies the several words he has learned.

The usual singing notes of the bird are more of the character of the Nightingale, mingled occasionally with the sound of the dog-whistle used about the house. It whistles also, very clearly, the first bar of "*God save the Queen.*" It is hardly necessary to add that the bird is, of course, by nature remarkably tame; so much so, that, during its season, it will perch down from its cage on my finger, shouting and talking in the most excited state.

Our friend Mr. Waterhouse Hawkins, who has heard the bird, tells me that about twenty years ago a Canary that spoke a few words was exhibited in Regent Street, the only other instance, I believe, publicly known.

I have now only to apologize for having trespassed upon your

patience to read all this long story about the accomplishments of a Little Bird ; though at the same time I feel, that in acquainting you, as Vice-President of the Zoological Society, with the facts stated, I am not only giving you the means of placing upon record the same, but affording you the opportunity of witnessing the *truth* thereof, as being, in the event of any accident happening to the bird, a more satisfactory evidence than the mere assertion of,

Dear Sir,

Yours most faithfully,

S. LEIGH SOTHEBY.

Dr. John Gray.

April 27, 1858.

Dr. Gray, V.P., in the Chair.

The following papers were read :—

1. SYNOPSIS OF THE AMERICAN ANT-BIRDS (FORMICARIIDÆ).  
 BY PHILIP LUTLEY SCLATER, M.A., F.L.S., ETC. PART II.  
 CONTAINING THE FORMICIVORINÆ OR ANT-WRENS.

(Aves, Pl. CXLI., CXLII.)

Subfam. II. FORMICIVORINÆ.

*Habitus gracilior, statura minor : rostrum tenuius, magis subulatum, vix uncinatum : tarsi gracilibus ; acrotarsiis interdum, paratarsiis plerumque integris.*

I have met with very great difficulty in separating this group into genera presenting good distinguishing characters. Dr. Cabanis has depended mainly upon the division of the tarsal scutes ; but I have found instances of great variation in this respect in apparently very closely allied species, although, I confess, this character ought to be attended to, and has been much too generally overlooked. Then again as to the number of rectrices, it is not only in the long-tailed *Ellipuræ* (as termed by Cabanis) that they are reduced to ten, but also in some of the short-tailed species (as in *Myrmotherula huxwelli* and *M. pygmæa*) ; and I have been compelled to abandon that sign as a ground for generic difference. On the other hand, Dr. Cabanis seems to me to have attached too little weight to comparative length of the tail, as in placing *Formicivora grisea* and *Myrmotherula pygmæa* in the same genus ; and I have thought it more natural to arrange the long-tailed and short-tailed *Formicivoræ* in different sections.